

CONSUMER INFORMATION FROM USDA

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Turkey Basics: Safe Cooking

Turkeys Are Cooking Faster Than Before

But "timing's NOT everything." Recommended cooking techniques must also be followed. A meat thermometer should be used to ensure a sufficient internal temperature has been reached to destroy bacteria and prevent foodborne illness -- as well as to prevent overcooking.

Many variables can affect the roasting time of the whole bird:

- A partially frozen bird requires longer cooking.
- Dark roasting pans cook faster than shiny metals.
- The depth and size of the pan can reduce heat circulation to all areas of the bird.
- The use of a foil tent for the entire time can slow cooking.
- Use of the roasting pan's lid speeds cooking.
- An oven cooking bag can accelerate cooking time.
- A stuffed bird takes longer to cook.
- Oven may heat food unevenly.
- Calibration of the oven's thermostat may be inaccurate.
- The rack position can have an effect on even cooking and heat circulation.
- A turkey or its pan may be too large for the oven, thus blocking heat circulation.

ROASTING INSTRUCTIONS FOR SAFETY AND DONENESS:

1. Set the oven temperature no lower than 325 °F. Preheating is not necessary.
2. Be sure the turkey is completely thawed. Times are based on fresh or completely thawed frozen birds at a refrigerator temperature of 40 °F or below.
3. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2 1/2 inches deep.
Optional steps:
 - Tuck wing tips back under shoulders of bird (called "akimbo").
 - Add 1/2 cup water to the bottom of the pan.
 - In the beginning, a tent of aluminum foil may be placed loosely over the breast of the turkey for the first 1 to 1 1/2 hours, then removed for browning. Or, a tent of foil may be placed over the turkey after the turkey has reached the desired golden brown.

Call Toll-free For More Information

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
1 (800) 535-4555
Washington, DC: (202) 720-3333
TTY: 1 (800) 256-7072
FSIS Web site: www.fsis.usda.gov

4. If a meat thermometer is not available, cook stuffing in a casserole. Mix ingredients just before stuffing a turkey; stuff loosely. Additional time is required for the turkey and stuffing to reach a safe internal temperature (see chart below).
5. For safety and doneness, the internal temperature should be checked with a meat thermometer. The temperature must reach 180 °F in the thigh of a whole turkey (center of the stuffing should reach 165 °F) before removing it from the oven. Cook a turkey breast to 170 °F.
6. Juices should be clear. In the absence of a meat thermometer, pierce an unstuffed turkey with a fork in several places; juices should be clear with no trace of pink.
7. Let the bird stand 20 minutes before removing stuffing and carving.

APPROXIMATE COOKING TIMES

UNSTUFFED

4 to 6 lb breast.....	1 ½ to 2 ¼ hrs
6 to 8 lb breast...	2 ¼ to 3 ¼ hrs
8 to 12 lbs.....	2 ¾ to 3 hrs
12 to 14 lbs.....	3 to 3 ¾ hrs
14 to 18 lbs.....	3 ¾ to 4 ¼ hrs
18 to 20 lbs.....	4 ¼ to 4 ½ hrs
20 to 24 lbs.....	4 ½ to 5 hrs

STUFFED

8 to 12 lbs.....	3 to 3 ½ hrs
12 to 14 lbs.....	3 ½ to 4 hrs
14 to 18 lbs.....	4 to 4 ¼ hrs
18 to 20 lbs.....	4 ¼ to 4 ¾ hrs
20 to 24 lbs.....	4 ¾ to 5 ¼ hrs